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DOE awards INL 'Star' certification for safety

The Department of Energy has re-certified Idaho National Laboratory as a DOE-Voluntary Protection Program Star (VPP) site. The achievement was announced in a June 14 letter to INL Laboratory Director John Grossenbacher.

"Your continuing commitment to excellence in safety and health is evident throughout INL," noted Patrice Bubar, DOE's deputy assistant secretary for Corporate Performance Assessment.

"VPP Star status is recognition that INL has a program of safety excellence and continuous improvement," said Bowen Huntsman, INL's Voluntary Protection Program manager. "This recognition says the employees care enough about safety to pay attention to the details that make projects and programs safe and successful. Leadership at all levels vigorously support the safety program."

The DOE began its Voluntary Protection Program in 1992 to promote improved safety and health performance at its many facilities around the country. Based on Occupational Safety and Health Administration standards, only those sites that are "best in class" achieve Star status. Fewer than 1,200 companies or organizations nationwide have achieved either OSHA or DOE Star status, out of the seven million workplaces that are eligible to apply.

Certification came following a week-long assessment in May of the laboratory's safety program. The 10-person review team interviewed managers throughout INL, and randomly visited with employees in Idaho Falls and Idaho desert facilities to assess awareness and knowledge of safety programs. In addition, the team reviewed safety processes and systems in place by touring Site facilities.

Huntsman explained that the laboratory received VPP Star certification in 2001 and was re-certified in 2004. As the new Idaho National Laboratory, created in February 2005, it was necessary to be certified again.

Among the strengths noted by the team is a strong safety attitude and commitment of the workforce, management support and commitment, a safety environment where employees are not hesitant to stop work to ensure safety, active employee safety teams and thorough hazards recognition.

Huntsman said VPP Star status communicates to current and potential customers that INL places great value on conducting work safely, which is essential to its mission.

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